

# The Fuguelgrasp (Choose)

by Bkw3rm

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Summary: As a team, Hiccup and Toothless are unstoppable. But when the Riders face a new dragon, the question arises: What if Hiccup had made a different choice the fateful day he met Toothless? Rated T for my own paranoia and for (spoiler!) character deaths. 0.0

## 1. Prologue: Strange Dreams

Author's Note: Hi guys! This is my first foray into HTTYD fan fiction. The idea for this story came to me after watching Fright of Passage, and it's been building in my head ever since. No schedule for updating yet, but the story **\_\*\*will\*\*\_** be complete by the time HTTYD 2 comes out. Thanks for reading, and please follow/favorite/review! ~Bkw3rm

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><p><strong><em>Every Viking makes a choice that characterizes them for the rest of their life. For Hiccup, saving Toothless defined the man he would become. When faced with ending a life or saving it, he chose to be merciful. But what if history were rewritten? What if Hiccup had the same choice over again- and he ended a life?<em>\*\*

"Be careful, Hiccup!" Astrid called. "It's getting upset!"

"Yeah, you know, I can see that!" Hiccup hissed over his shoulder.

The pale dragon did look increasingly agitated and worried, both heads snapping as Hiccup came closer. The dragon, which the twins had dubbed The Fearsome Frederick and Farley, was a little-known Fear Class dragon called the Fuguelgrasp. Victims of the gasses spewed from the twin heads would slip into a deep sleep for days, only to reawaken as shadows of their former selves. The only victim on Berk in recent history was Right Hook Rudy, now known as Restless Rudy for

his inability to sit still or look anyone in the eye. Restless Rudy had been the first to spot the Fuguelgrasp circling the forests of Berk, and had implored Stoick to get rid of it. Stoick had then tasked the Dragon Riders with safely relocating the dragon far away from Berk. Which brought the matter back to Hiccup, as he faced The Fearsome Frederick and Farley.

"Okay, Freddy, easy buddy. You too, Farley. I'm not gonna hurt ya," Hiccup said softly, rolling his eyes slightly at the twins name for the dragon. Frederick's eyes narrowed as Hiccup approached, but Farley's eyes were getting bigger and friendlier. Hiccup switched his focus to the second head, waving at the other teens behind him to back off a few feet. If the dragon felt less cornered, it might relax more fully. It had proven to be an agile and evasive flier, eluding the Dragon Riders for the better part of the day. They had finally tricked it into a tight quarry, where there hadn't been enough room for the Fuguelgrasp to wheel around and squeeze past them. The yellow dragon had been forced to land, and the other dragons hovered over it while Hiccup and Toothless had landed to try and train it.

Farley drew back his head slightly when Hiccup came closer. When Hiccup halted, the dragon paused, taking him in. Behind him, Toothless growled. Hiccup waved frantically at him, trying to make him stop. Toothless quieted, but a low grumble that reached Hiccup's ears let him know the dragon was unhappy. Farley had started at Toothless' protestations, but he was now looking curiously at the boy standing in front of him. Hiccup was worried that Frederick was still looking upset, it would be easier to train the dragon if both heads were cooperating. On that note, if Farley was willing to trust him, Frederick would follow. Making his decision, Hiccup reached out his hand, and turned his head away.

"Um, Hiccup?" Fishlegs whisper-yelled. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm trying to make him trust me. Now, keep it down!"

"Cool! Hey, if he loses his hand too, do you think he can find a replacement one somewhere?" Ruffnut remarked to Tuffnut.

"Yea, Hiccup always finds the good stuff. Stupid good luck!" her twin replied.

"I didn't just 'find' a replacement foot. Shush!"

"Hey when you die, I get Toothless!" Toothless snarled in response to Snotlout's comment.

"Will you all please be quiet! I'm trying to train a dragon here," Hiccup cried, frustrated.

It was too late. All of a sudden, Frederick's head drew back sharply, forcing Farley to follow. The heads seemed to argue briefly, and then agree. They looked down at Hiccup with malice as the pouches behind their jaws swelled with gas. Hiccup bolted for Toothless, but the Fuguelgrasp forced itself into the air, wheeling to cut Hiccup off. Toothless sprang, the Fuguelgrasp fired, Hiccup cried out, and the world went black.

Hiccup sat up with a start in his bedroom, mind spinning. Yawning, he

tried to figure out what woke him. An explosion outside put both feet on the floor in a hurry. "Both feet? Hiccup stared down at his boots, confusion mirroring his thoughts. Why did it feel like he should only have one? Attributing the weird feeling to even weirder dreams, he shook his head and ran down the stairs. Dragons were attacking, and he had to get to Gobber.

## 2. Afraid to Kill

Author's Note: Okay guys, here's Chapter One! Sorry for the long wait. To make up for it, I'm uploading 3 chapters today! Yay! Ahem. For this chapter, I had a lot of trouble deciding how much of the actual movie dialogue to keep in, so sorry if it seems a little stilted. From Chapter 2 onward, we'll be in my headcanon, so it should flow better. As always, thanks for reading, and follow/favorite/review! ~Bkw3rm

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><p>Hiccup raced through the early morning air, dodging Vikings as they questioned why 'the runt' was about. He made it to the smith, exchanged the usual banter with Gobber, and waited for his opportunity. The Night Fury only showed up on certain attack nights, and Hiccup was sure it was due for an appearance. When Gobber left to join in the fight, Hiccup seized his chance.<p>

Perched on the hill above Berk, Hiccup scanned the night skies anxiously. By his calculations of the Night Fury's movements, the dragon should be using the darkness of the pre-dawn sky as camouflage, hiding its movements until it was time to strike.

"Come on," Hiccup urged, "Gimme something to shoot at, gimme something to shoot at." There! The Night Fury struck the outpost, turning it into matchwood. In the afterglow of its blast, Hiccup spotted a dark shape hurtling through the darkness. He fired, and the recoil of the machine threw him to the ground. Scrambling to his feet, Hiccup made out a dark shape shooting towards Raven Point.

"Oh, I hit it! Yes! I hit it! Did anyone see that?" No one had, of course, except for the Monstrous Nightmare that crested the ridge. The enormous dragon chased Hiccup back down the hill, setting fire to the pillar Hiccup used as shelter. The effects were catastrophic, setting the previously captured dragons free. The poor sheep wailed as they were carried off in the reptiles' claws. Hiccup guiltily watched them fly off, then turned to his dad.

"Okay, but I hit a Night Fury." His attempts to placate his father proved futile. Exasperated, Stoick sent Hiccup home along with Gobber to ensure the lanky teen got there. Once inside, Hiccup grabbed his notebook and pencil. Gobber was wrong, he thought. The only way to be respected in Berk was to kill a dragon. And even if he wasn't a dragon-killer at heart, he was going to make it happen anyway. Maybe then Stoick would finally look at him with approval.

Later, at Raven Point, Hiccup crossed out yet another portion of his map. He was beginning to think he would never find the dragon. Maybe the bolas hadn't hit the dragon in the right spot; maybe it long since loosed itself and flew away. "Ugh, the gods hate me. Some

people lose their knife, or their mug. Not me, I manage to lose an entire dragon!" He smacked a low-hanging branch out of frustration. The branch, of course, then snapped back and hit him in the face. Suddenly, Hiccup realized the branch was only a small part of a trail of destruction in front of him. The trail ended at the body of a dragon as dark as the night sky.

"Oh wow. I did it. I did it! This fixes everything! Yes!" Hiccup placed his left foot atop the dragon's dead body. "I have brought down this mighty beast!" The Night Fury exhaled. Hiccup leapt back. "Whoa!" Trembling, he clutched his dagger feebly.

The dragons not dead the dragons not dead the dragons not dead ran through his mind. I have to kill it, he realized. Right here, right now. He edged closer to the beast's head, heart hammering in his chest. He looked toward the dragon, only to find it staring back at him coldly. The Night Fury's green orbs glared at him in defiance. Ignoring the animosity in the animal's eyes, Hiccup rolled his shoulders, gathering his nerve.

"I'm going to kill you, dragon. I'm gonna cut out your heart and take it to my father. I am a Viking. I am a Viking!" Hiccup raised the dagger over his head, preparing to strike. The dragon's labored breaths drew his attention. He glanced back into the Night Fury's eyes. The dragon gaze burned into Hiccup. There was less anger in its gaze, and more- what was it, fear? Hiccup could relate to the look of abject terror. They were both scared, he realized. The dragon was afraid to die, but Hiccup was afraid to kill.

A true Viking would never be afraid to kill his enemy, he thought. With that thought racing through his mind, Hiccup steeled himself and plunged his dagger into the Night Fury's hate-filled eye.

### 3. I'll Be Here

Author's Note: This chapter flowed much better, in my opinion. The ending may be a touch cliché, but I'm through messing with it for right now. Lol. Let me know what you all think! Thanks. ~Bkw3rm

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><p>Night had fallen by the time Hiccup made it back to Berk. It had been exhausting, bloody work, but he had done it. Hiccup stumbled into the main square clutching his bundled vest, searching for his father. There! Stoick was talking to Gobber. They looked as though they disagreed on something. Hiccup jogged up to his father wearily. "Look, Dad, I got it!"<p>

Stoick looked around, mildly irritated. "You got what, Hiccup? What is so important that it can't wait?"

Hiccup unwrapped his vest and held it out to his father. "It's the heart of the Night Fury, Dad. I shot it down, and I killed it, and I cut out its heart and brought it to you." Stoick and Gobber exchanged glances. Hiccup proffered the organ toward his father, pleading. "Look, you can still see it beating!" Still Stoick remained silent, and Gobber seemed hesitant. "What is it?" Hiccup demanded. "I killed a dragon, I even have proof! Why are you looking at me like that?"

Haven't I proved I'm one of you?!" The square was silent, save for the drip, drip of the dragon's blood as the heart sluggishly continued to beat. Hiccup was sure he looked a sight, covered in blood and holding a vest with the heart of a dragon. Even so, this wasn't the most shocking thing a Viking had done in Berk. Not by a long shot. Why were they just staring at him?

Stoick sighed, rubbing his brow slowly. "Aye, Hiccup, I can see you've worked hard to bring this to me. But this..." Here he paused, looking for the right words. "Hiccup, this is not the heart of a dragon, certainly not a Night Fury."

Hiccup chuckled nervously. "Of course it is. I brought it down, just off of Raven Point, like I said. It was still alive, and I killed it with my knife this morning! You weren't there, Dad!" his voice cracking on the last syllable.

Gobber cleared his throat. "The thing is, Hiccup, dragon hearts are huge! Much bigger than that," looking at the bundle in Hiccup's arms, "wee thing. What you've got there is the size of a yak's heart."

Hiccup stared at Gobber, disbelieving. "A yak."

"Albeit a very, very, large yak. Monstrous even. Almost the size of Silent Sven's dearly departed Blue." Gobber looked at Hiccup pointedly.

"Blue's dead? When did that happen? What does this have to with my Night Fury?" Hiccup was growing frustrated. He wasn't expecting a hero's welcome when he presented his prize, but he had expected grudging respect, at least.

Stoick spoke up. "Silent Sven killed Blue this morning. With last night's attack, our food stores have gone down drastically. Blue would have gone a long way toward helping the village get through winter." Stoick paused. "Silent Sven had left Blue's body in a field. When he came back later, the yak had been torn apart. It was gruesome, and clearly the work of enraged boars." Another pause. "Despite this, there was still plenty of meat. The organs had been left alone. But the heart was missing."

The implications knocked the wind out of Hiccup. "You think I took some heart from a yak and tried to pass it off as a dragon's? That's ridiculous. Can't you even give me credit as being too smart to steal it and bring it to you just a few hours later? Look, if you don't believe me, just come with me to Raven Point. I'll show you its body."

Stoick sighed. "I'm sorry, son. It's too dark now to send a search party."

"But if you just came, and saw--"

"Hiccup! Enough of the stories. I don't have time for another wild goose chase!" Stoick faltered after this, seeing the look of hurt and betrayal on Hiccup's face. Before he could say anything else, Hiccup's features hardened into burning resentment.

Hiccup threw the Night Fury's heart onto the ground. It landed with a

sickening squish on the stones as blood dribbled into the cracks between them. Hiccup turned on his heel and stalked out of the square, not sparing glances for the teens of the fire brigade as he passed. He could hear Snotlout jeering in the background. "What a loser! What kind of numbskull brings a fake dragon's heart to the chief?!" The twins laughed and responded in kind. Astrid and Fishlegs, mercifully, were quiet. Shaking his head at their mocking, Hiccup broke into a run and didn't stop until he reached his room. He threw himself onto his bed, rolling onto his back and stewing at the ceiling.

His own father didn't believe him. He was openly mocked in the village. Everyone thought he was a screwup, that he was worthless. Even when he tried to make it right, it still wasn't good enough! His thoughts continued in this vein for at least an hour, and then he heard Stoick enter the house. Having made up his mind, Hiccup started down the stairs. "I'm enrolling in Dragon Training." Surprised, Stoick looked up at his son. Hiccup looked determined, and something in his face made Stoick not question his resolve. He cleared his throat.

"I -ah- I think that's a good idea, son. Gobber and I were just talking about that earlier today. He's starting a new batch of recruits tomorrow. Here," he dropped an axe into Hiccup's hands, pretending to not notice the way it weighed Hiccup down. "When you carry this axe, you'll carry all of us with you."

"I'm pretty sure the village won't want me carrying them with me. But don't worry," Hiccup said sarcastically gesturing towards himself. "I'll be stopping all of 'this'." Stoick was taken a little aback. Hiccup's wry sense of humor usually enabled the teen to bounce back from embarrassments and humiliations, but this was more bitter than he had ever seen his son.

Mentally shrugging off the young man's strange behavior, Stoick grabbed his helmet and bag packed for the trip ahead. "Ah- good. Train hard. I'll be back. Probably." He walked out the door, hesitating when it closed behind him. Something was not right with the boy. He and Hiccup had never really connected in the same way that Hiccup connected with his mother. Since she disappeared, Stoick had stumbled and tumbled around being a good father in the only way he knew how. Dragon training would make a good man of Hiccup. Stoick strode off toward the boats, hoping he was right.

As the door closed behind Stoick, Hiccup had stood there for a moment. He dropped the axe, letting it fall to the ground with a thunk. Eyes blazing with resolution, he vowed, "And I'll be here." Stoick and the rest of the village would see that Hiccup was a true Viking. He would be a dragon slayer, and they would never look down on him again.

#### 4. How To Kill Dragons

Author's Note: Woohoo! Chapter 3! Now things are really going to start happening. There's a bit more movie dialogue in the first portion here, but that should be the last bit of it. I'm trying to stay true to the new character arc I'm creating for Hiccup in this story, so if he seems a little OOC, that would be why. He's bitter, disappointed, and desperate to prove himself. I've also reimagined

his relationship with Astrid, since now Hiccup is determined to be first in class. Okay, I know you didn't come here to read my blathering. On with the story! Oh, and please, favorite, follow, review, recommend, all that jazz! Thanks. ~Bkw3rm

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><p>"Welcome to Dragon Training!" Gobber bellowed in a voice unsuitable for the hour of the morning. The young would-be dragon soldiers trailed in, talking excitedly amongst themselves. Hiccup could hear Astrid and the twins discussing possible scarring and mauling possibilities. Normally he would cut in with some ironic comment on their discussion, but today he was just determined to soak up as much knowledge as he could. His silence did not remove him from notice, Tuffnut still noticed him and complained about his presence. Gobber, however, ignored the snide remarks and continued, "Let's get started! The recruit who does best will win the honor of killing his first dragon in front of the entire village."<p>

Snotlout snorted. "Hiccup already killed a Night Fury, so does that disqualify him or...?"

"Yea," Tuffnut remarked. "Can I transfer to the class with the cool Vikings?"

Gobber pulled Hiccup aside, whispering, "Don't worry. You're small and you're weak. That'll make you less of a target. They'll see you as sick or insane, and go after the more Viking-like teens instead." He ushered Hiccup in line with the rest of the recruits. As Gobber continued his introductory lecture, Hiccup gritted his teeth. He supposed Gobber was trying to be reassuring, but only succeeded in reminding Hiccup just how much he stood out in Berk. Too weak, too strange, not brave enough. Qualities that would never be his if he stood on the sidelines here. Hiccup made up his mind. The dragon training academy would be his proving ground. No more would he be afraid to step up. If he wanted to be taken seriously, he would have to make it happen here.

Being deep in thought, Hiccup missed the first moments of Gobber's breakdown on the Gronckle. Running after the other teens, he was able to grab a shield just as the dragon struck out the twins. As the remaining teens began to bang on their shields to throw off the dragon's aim, Hiccup noticed that of all the teens, Astrid would be the most likely to succeed at training and be the first teen to kill a dragon in front of the village. The twins wouldn't take training seriously enough to be a threat, Fishlegs would be happy to explain how the dragon would kill you from a safe distance away, and Snotlout seemed most interested in flirting with Astrid. If he could somehow come up with a way to beat Astrid, then he could be the winner. Hiccup sighed inwardly. Astrid was pretty and smart and dangerous. There was no way he was going to beat her. Was there?

The Gronckle had struck out Fishlegs and Snotlout and was now wheeling to take in the two remaining teens. As Hiccup turned to comment to Astrid about working together to throw off the dragon's aim, she somersaulted away. The dragon's blast knocked Hiccup's shield off his arm. Panicking, he chased after it as Gobber yelled after him. The Gronckle slammed into Hiccup, readying to fire. As Hiccup shrunk into the wall, Gobber yanked the beast away at the last second. As if Hiccup needed reminding, Gobber lectured them all, "A

dragon will always," pointedly, "\_always\_ go for the kill." Hiccup brushed himself off. A question was stirring in his mind, but he wasn't sure where to get answers. Above the arena, a skinny figure watched as Gobber closed the class for the day and dismissed the teens.

That night, a storm rocked the Great Hall. Because of the rain, there would be no dragon attacks. Gobber took the opportunity to encourage them to read the Book of Dragons. Hiccup had glanced at the tome before, but he had never taken the time to peruse it fully. After everyone left, Hiccup grabbed the volume. As he flipped through it, he became aware of one repeated omission. None of the dragons had any weaknesses. Hiccup flipped back and forth through the pages, looking for anything that might hint at a way to defeat the beasts. Sure, bolas worked, swords worked. But there had to be something more. If Vikings were ever going to win the war against the dragons, they had to try something different.

The doors to the Great Hall banged open. Hiccup jumped, his heart pounding as he turned towards the entrance. There, silhouetted by a sudden strike of lightning, stood a Night Fury. The creature's eyes blazed with green fire as it stood there, watching Hiccup. Hiccup gasped slightly, blinking rapidly and shaking his head. It was impossible for the dragon to be there. It was dead! When Hiccup looked again, the dragon was gone and the hall doors were slowly swinging shut. Hiccup forced himself to breathe. "Easy, easy," he thought. "Don't get jumpy because of a little storm." All the same, he decided to go back home for the night. Unbeknownst to him, a slim shadow watched him as he crossed the fields to get back to his house.

The next day in training, the teens faced the Deadly Nadder. As he wove around the makeshift wooden walls Gobber had put up, Hiccup decided to ask why there wasn't more information about dragon weaknesses.

"But you know, I was just wondering, how none of the dragons have any sort of weaknesses mentioned?" Hiccup waited while Gobber admonished the twins to hide in the Deadly Nadder's blind spot. "Exactly! Blind spots aren't really covered in the book. What else might it be missing?"

"No one's stuck around to study the beasts in depth. They were too busy trying not to get killed. As you should be."

"Right, I know, but isn't there like a way to study them in a controlled environment or something? I can't help thinking there's so much more we don't know."

"Focus on the dragon in front of you, Hiccup. Think about studying it later!"

Hiccup sighed. Clearly, he wasn't getting anywhere with this line of questioning. He'd have to try a different approach. He suddenly noticed Astrid and Snotlout were frantically waving at him to get down. The Nadder was approaching, and he was about to be in its line of sight. He ducked swiftly, then tried to follow the others as they rolled away to safety. Unfortunately, he didn't account for the weight of the shield. The dragon spotted him and charged. Hiccup ran as fast as his legs could carry him. As the other teens scrambled to



get out of the way, the Nadder switched targets, chasing Astrid instead. In its pursuit, the dragon clumsily knocked over some of the flimsy walls. The whole structure started to collapse. Interesting, Hiccup noted. The Nadder was light on its feet, but couldn't maneuver well in tight spaces. That fact wasn't going to help him dodge the falling walls though, so he filed it away for future reference and ran out of the reach of the falling walls.

Astrid had managed to keep ahead of the dragon while the wooden partitions collapsed, and now she clenched the handle of her double-bladed axe tightly as the Nadder wheeled and came at her again. As the Nadder came in reach, she swung, slicing the Nadder below the jaw. The dragon gave a squawk like an injured chicken as it turned away, blood dripping down its neck.

Hiccup watched the blood ooze out of the wound. His breathing slowed and he was once again near the cove, cutting into the Night Fury to reach the desired heart, blood coating his hands as he worked. Distantly, he was aware Astrid was saying something to him, but he was lost in his reverie.

"Hey! Weirdo!" That got his attention. Astrid was glaring at him accusingly. "You want to maybe get your head in the game? If you don't learn to focus, you're going to get yourself and everyone around you killed."

"Why, Astrid, I didn't know you cared," Hiccup snarked. What was her problem?

"I care about the fact that our parents war is about to become ours! And that means," she gestured to all the teens in the arena, "that we are all going to have to rely on one another for backup! Right now, I don't trust you to take of yourself. You'll be absolutely useless in a fight!"

"Yea, well maybe I'm more interested in winning the war than fighting in it!" Hiccup fired back. "Learning more about our enemies' weaknesses is probably the only way to make sure that we come out on top."

"The only way to beat them is to keep doing what we're doing. This is the way our ancestors did it, and it's how we're going to win," Astrid seethed.

"I don't know, maybe that's enough for you, Astrid. But there has to be a better way, and I'm going to find it."

Astrid laughed disbelievingly. "You? You cause disaster everywhere you go. And you're going to be Berk's salvation?" She snorted. "You know what? Maybe you should get closer to the dragons. Maybe your bad luck will rub off on them for a change."

"All right, that's enough," Gobber cut in. "We'll pick up training again tomorrow. In the meantime, maybe you're both right. Learning more could add some helpful measures to our tried-and-true tactics. However, that is something to be pursued at a later time."

Hiccup rolled his eyes in disbelief as he left the arena. They just didn't get it! Doing the same thing over and over wasn't going to get rid of the dragons. Berk was always reacting, never taking the

offensive. Stoick and the others were trying to find the nest, but it seemed like a futile endeavor. They had to come up with other ways to go on the attack, something they could use here on Berk. Preoccupied, Hiccup started when a bony hand landed on his shoulder.

"Hiccup," Mildew drawled. "Just getting out of training, eh?"

Hiccup's eyes narrowed. The old man was Stoick's loudest dissenter, always trying to undermine his authority in front of the village. "What do you want, Mildew?" he asked warily.

Mildew gave him a snaggletoothed grin. "Why, I want to help you! Isn't that the prerogative of an old man, to pass on his wisdom to a new generation?" He lowered his voice and leaned in close to Hiccup. "I'm going to help you learn how to kill dragons."

## 5. Show Me

Author's Note: Hello dear readers! You may have noticed that I changed the title of this story from "The Fuguelgrasp" to "The Fuguelgrasp (Choose)". Choice is an important plot point in the story. In fact, I felt there was a little bit of a disconnect with the story so far with how I have the ending planned out. To rectify this, I've added one introductory paragraph in the beginning of the prologue. Go read it. Now. Please. :) It'll help the ending flow better, I promise. All right, on with the story! And review, follow, favorite, recommend, etc. Thanks! ~Bkw3rm

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><p>Hiccup stared at Mildew in disbelief. "I'm sorry, did you just say you wanted to help me kill dragons? Are you serious?"<p>

"Yes, I am." Seeing the skepticism on Hiccup's face, Mildew sighed. "Look, Hiccup, I know that your father and I have had our differences-" the look on Hiccup's face grew even more incredulous "-but if there's one thing we agree on, it's dragons. They're a menace to Berk! I'll not be run out of a second home because of those horrid beasts!"

Hiccup could believe him. Mildew and Stoick often butted heads on many issues, but when dragons attacked, the men laid aside their differences and fought together. Sensing the teen softening, Mildew spoke again.

"Why don't you take the rest of the day to think about it?" he suggested. "Tomorrow, if you've decided to take me up on my offer, come over to my house after dragon training. I'll teach you a few things." Hiccup nodded and started to move past him, but Mildew stopped him again. "Frankly, my boy, it's the only way you're going to beat that Hofferson girl."

"Why are you interested in helping me? Why not any of the other kids? I'm not exactly the best fighter."

"You're right. You're better than that. I've seen you in the arena, Hiccup. You ask questions. You're not satisfied with the way things are. Flexible minds like yours are what's going to win this

war."

"Flexible doesn't mean malleable, Mildew. If I'm going to do this, I won't be your puppet, and I won't side with you against my father."

Mildew cackled. "You never stop thinking, do you! Although I can assure you that my only intention is to get rid of the dragons, once and for all."

Later that night, Hiccup was contemplating Mildew's offer. He had no reason to trust the old man, but was Mildew really a threat? The old man clearly had his own agenda, but if he could help Hiccup kill dragons, it would be worth a shot. Mildew's words echoed in his mind. "That's the only way you're going to beat that Hofferson girl." Hiccup burned with embarrassment and resentment. It rankled him to know that Mildew was probably right. She had been training to become a warrior her whole life. He had been more interested in inventing machines to do things that he couldn't. Hiccup sat up in bed. He didn't like Mildew, but he was willing to do anything to get ahead in dragon training. He had to be able to kill a dragon in front of Berk and prove, once and for all, that he was one of them. Mind made up, Hiccup resolved to get some sleep. He wanted to be well rested. Tomorrow was going to be a long day.

Hiccup sat up abruptly, eyes wide. There, silhouetted by the moon shining in his bedroom window, crouched a dragon. 'No', he corrected himself. Not "a" dragon. "The" dragon. The cursed beast's eyes glowered green fire. Hiccup knew he must be dreaming, but he couldn't persuade his locked muscles to unfreeze. The Night Fury crept closer to Hiccup's bed, causing him to catch his breath and his heart to hammer wildly in his chest. The beast loomed over him, hate filling its gaze. The dragon opened its maw, ready to deliver the flame that would result in Hiccup's death.

Hiccup screamed himself awake. The sky was grey in the pre-dawn mist. He buried his face in his shaking hands. Why was this haunting him? Did all Vikings feel this way after killing their first dragon? It wasn't likely that he would ever find out; Vikings didn't talk about their feelings. He sighed. There was no way he would get back to sleep now. He got up and started poring through the Book of Dragons, making notes in his sketchbook as he went. He started musing aloud as he read. "So the Scaldron needs water to make its attacks. If we could somehow lure one inland, and trap it away from water, we wouldn't be liable to its blasts. Now the Hideous Zipplebackâ€¦"

After class, Hiccup slipped away from the rest of the group. Once he reached Mildew's house on the outskirts of Berk, he paused. Strengthening his resolve, he rolled his shoulders and knocked. The door swung open silently. "Okay, that's not creepy at all", he thought. He crossed the threshold warily. The door slammed shut suddenly. Hiccup jumped and spun around. Mildew cackled. "You should have seen your face!" Seeing Hiccup's frown, he shook his head. "I know you don't trust me lad, but give me some credit! I know better than to mess with the chief's son."

"What am I doing here Mildew?" Hiccup asked, suddenly tired.

Mildew grew serious. "If people like us want to kill dragons, we

can't go about it the same way as some of our more beefy brethren. We have to watch them, learn their habits and weaknesses. If we do that, then we can turn that against them. They'll never see us coming! I watched you in the arena with that Nadder. You noticed that it doesn't turn easily when it's in tight spaces. It's the little things like that that make a difference."

"Okay, I'm listening. But how do I do that?"

"With these!" Mildew pulled aside a curtain with a flourish. There, on the floor wereâ€¦ "Zippleback boots! I made them myself." He grinned proudly.

"How did you do that?"

"By doing what I told you. The Hideous Zippleback's two heads can easily be distracted into looking in different directions. When they do, it's a matter of a few quick chops and the job is done. I prefer to go for the head that lights the gas first. Fungus was great help. Weren't you, boy?" Fungus baa-ed.

"Mildew, this is incredible! Does anyone else know that you brought down a Zippleback by yourself?"

"Oh, I tried to tell them, but they didn't believe me. Sound familiar?" Hiccup grimaced and nodded. "So I kept going." He pulled out the claw of a Monstrous Nightmare. "I teased this creature until it ran out of shots and then lured it into the woods. Because of its size, it was forced to land. Once in the shadows, it couldn't see the tripwire I laid. Brought a log crashing down on its head. But of course, I was younger then." Mildew sighed, then brightened. "And that is where you come in!"

"How?"

"You're young and canny. With my experience and your innovative mind, we might be able to come up with a way to rid Berk of dragons for good!"

"No, I mean, how? What do the boots have to do with it?"

"Ah!" Mildew actually looked excited. "Wearing them gets you close to the dragons. One of the reasons why Vikings can't sneak up on dragons is smell. If they're not attacking, they'll take to the skies before we can reach them. The boots help mask the Viking smell, and ensure we don't leave human tracks."

"The boots do all that?"

"Wellâ€¦ this helps too." Mildew pulled out a lump of something. "This is dragon musk. It completely masks the human scent."

"Ugh! It stinks!"

"It does! But it's the only way to get close to them." Mildew opened the door and looked up at the sky. "In fact, if we get going right now, we can find some before the sun sets."

Hiccup looked at Mildew resolutely. "Show me."

## 6. Get Rid of Them Forever

Author's Note: Hi guys! It's crunch time right now, I'm racing against my Friday deadline. It'll be tight, but I think I'll make it. In the meantime, here's another chapter for you! This has Hiccup learning all about how to take down dragons. Plus, I've added a tiny bit of backstory for Mildew. I don't really like him, but he won't go away! Lol. Anyways, hope you all enjoy this chapter. If so, review/refer/follow/favorite, etc. Thanks always! ~Bkw3rm

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><p>Mildew maneuvered the boat closer to the rocky pillars. "This is as far as I go!" he yelled over the wind and spray from the sea. "I'm too old to climb up there anymore. You have climb to the top and make your way over to that peninsula over there," pointing at steep cliffs jutting up from the ocean. "The boat will be smashed if I get too close or if we stay here too long. Be back in an hour or I'll leave and get you tomorrow!"<p>

Hiccup looked up at the towering sea stack, then turned to Mildew. "What do I do when I get up there?" he yelled.

"Observe, if you're lucky. I've seen dragons land there lots of times. As far as I can tell, it's a resting spot for them. You'll get to notice behaviors that you'd never have time to realize during an attack." Mildew called back.

Hiccup nodded and climbed onto the pillar. Carefully, he began to make his ascent, the Zippleback boots slung over his shoulder. Once he made it to the peninsula, he had about a half hour to find the dragons before had to leave. He shook his head, realizing that if this worked, he would have to start earlier the next time. He put the boots on and started to explore. As he rounded a corner, he saw them. Instinctively, he froze. Then, realizing he was downwind and out of their line of sight, he relaxed. Dropping into a crouch, he cautiously moved closer to the reptiles. There were about 7 dragons on the plateau in front of him, a couple of Nadders, Nightmares, and Gronckles. No Zipplebacks though. Hiccup silently cursed his luck. What if the dragons noticed his tracks later and realized there had been no Zipplebacks there that afternoon? He immediately dismissed that thought, the animals weren't that smart. Besides, at this point the ground was far too hard to leave tracks.

Hiccup quietly got out his notebook and started writing. As far as he could tell, the dragons were justâ€| relaxing. They were sort of lounging about, not doing anything. A group of Terrible Terrors landed amongst the larger dragons and started running around. The larger dragons mostly ignored them, but one Terror seemed insistent on picking a fight with a Gronckle. The Boulder Class beast had been eating rocks, but the Terror grabbed one of its smaller stones and was attempting to fly away with it. It chattered incessantly at the irritated Gronckle, darting this way and that, mocking it. Finally, it took a breath to blast the Gronckle with fire, but the Gronckle fired first. It hit the Terror full on in the face, causing the small dragon to drop the rock and flop to the ground. It lay there for a full minute, barely breathing. Then it apparently recovered; it hopped up and called to its pack. The Terror pack took the sky and flew off, chattering angrily the whole time.

Fascinated, Hiccup recorded the incident, writing furiously. If the dragons could be harmed by fire inside their bodies, then they must have a special stomach chamber specifically for making their flames. The Vikings could fight fire with fire, literally, if they could somehow launch fire into an attacking dragons mouth. It seemed to incapacitate them temporarily, which could be just enough time to finish it off. He would need to keep watching to make sure that this wasn't just a weakness of a Terrors.

Something was happening up ahead. A Nadder and a Nightmare were squaring off, shaking their heads and tails, stamping their feet and calling angrily at each other. Hiccup couldn't tell what started the fight, but both dragons seemed quite agitated. The Nadder lunged at the Nightmare, aiming for its neck. The Nightmare sidestepped the attack, beating the Nadder about the head with its large wings. Enraged, the Nadder spiked its tail and shot the spines at the Nightmare. It ducked, a ridiculous move for such a large creature, but one spine hit it right on the nose. Screaming in pain, it charged the Nadder, knocking it off its feet and into a sleeping Gronckle. Startled awake Gronckle yawned, then reached out a leg and scratched at the Nadder's neck. The Nadder, which had been climbing to its feet, dropped to the floor immediately unconscious. Hiccup did a double take. The Nightmare had been looming over the Nadder, ready to fire, but when the Nadder was no longer conscious, it held its fire and waddled off. Hiccup noted that the beast looked weirdly disappointed. Suddenly he realized how late it was getting. He only had a few minutes to get back to Mildew, and he did not want to stay overnight, regardless of how much he might learn.

When Hiccup made it to the boat, Mildew chuckled. "You just made it. I was about to leave when I saw you coming."

"How often are they here?" Hiccup asked. His mind was racing with the things he had learned. He wanted to know so much more!

"I'm not sure. It varies. You'll rarely see the same dragons twice." Hiccup's face fell. "But, I used to come every day when I was younger." The teens face brightened again.

"I'm coming back then. Everyday until I'm the best in dragon training." Hiccup punched his fist with his palm. "I have to kill that dragon."

The next day in class they were facing the Hideous Zippleback. Hiccup and Fishlegs had ended up being paired together as the dragon entered the arena. The noxious gas slowly blotted everyone else from view, keeping the teens on edge. Fishlegs was nervously spewing facts about the dragon. "Will you stop that!" Hiccup snapped. Then he reconsidered, Mildew's words coming back to him. The two heads of the Zippleback can be easily distracted into looking in different directions. "Actually, Fishlegs, keep talking," he said, quickly coming up with a plan. He could hear Tuffnut complaining about being 'very much hurt', so the creature would likely be coming toward them next.

"Fishlegs, when one of the heads appear, I want you to talk to it. Just distract while I try something. If it gets nasty, duck."

"Um, Hiccup? It's a dragon. I'm pretty sure that qualifies it as

nasty already."

"Just do it!"

Time was up. One head came through the fog right at Fishlegs. He threw his bucket of water on it, just as the dragon revealed the mouthful of sparks it was about to unleash. "Good, Fishlegs. Now just keep it distracted." \_That leaves me with the gas-breathing head,\_ he thought. Suddenly the head appeared, rushing straight at him. He readied his bucket and then shoved it onto the dragon's head. Before he could let go of the bucket, the blinded head reared back into the air, dragging him along. The Zippleback whipped its neck back and forth, trying to dislodge both boy and bucket, but Hiccup clung tightly to his perch.

"Hiccup! What're you doing?" yelled Gobber.

"Uh, improvising!" he yelled back. This wasn't part of the plan. The other head was no longer distracted by Fishlegs rambling and was coming straight at him. With seconds left to save himself, Hiccup made his decision. It was crazy, but it just might save his life. As the other head loomed over him, Hiccup reached for the blinded head's neck and scratched for all he was worth. For a moment, nothing happened. Then the blinded head dropped like a stone, unconscious. Hiccup was thrown clear, landing painfully on the stone floor. Dizzy, he sat up to view the results of his work. The Zippleback was confused, trying to move about, but was unable to because of the deadweight of its other half. Gobber picked up the sleeping head and fairly threw the dragon back in its cage.

Hiccup became aware of the other teens staring at him. He could hear them whispering: \_How did he do that? I've never seen a dragon react like that before.\_ He abruptly stood up. "Right, so, are we done here? 'Cause I've got a thing to, um, yeah-" He scurried out of the arena and down to the docks to meet Mildew.

Every day after class, Hiccup would make his way to those clusters of islands out in the middle of the ocean. He would watch the dragons from afar, taking copious notes on the things he observed, then put those observations to work in class.

Gronckles would overeat if given the chance, so he started collecting small stones and boulders to divert it from attacking the teens in the arena. The Gronckle would contentedly munch on the rocks until Hiccup was able to subdue it.

Once, on a cloudy day, when the sun was playing peek-a-boo with the clouds, he noticed the Terrors chasing the rays of sunshine. Later in class, he was able to trick one back into its cage by reflecting light off his shield.

Nadders were quite vain and would spend excessive amounts of time grooming. Armed with this knowledge, he filled a trough with water and distracted the dragon with its reflection. He then was able to render it unconscious by scratching its neck.

He quickly rose in rank through the class, even besting Astrid at times. Their rivalry started to attract visitors to the arena, cheering them on. Astrid's cheering section started out as larger, but as time went on, an equal amount of Vikings started cheering

Hiccup on as well. It gave him a smug sense of satisfaction whenever his methods beat hers. She would get so frustrated, stomping off angrily once class was over. Hiccup even caught her trying to follow him a few times. She finally confronted him one day. "Who are you training with?" she demanded. "Nobody gets as good as you do in a few weeks. Especially not a hiccup like you! Who's teaching you?"

Unfazed, Hiccup had smirked back widely. "Why, Astrid, I didn't know you still cared!" he shot back sarcastically. "I thought you considered the old ways the best. I wouldn't want to corrupt your ideals." He stole away before she could come up with a reply, slipping past the Vikings the twins had dubbed 'his adoring fans' to get down to the docks.

Later that day, a dragon not classified in the Book of Dragons showed up on the island. The dragons would usually eat large quantities of fish while on the island, but this dragon brought a catch of eels. The other dragons were afraid and agitated by this, and all left the plateau. Hiccup took note of this – if the dragons were scared of eels, that could be helpful in the arena. The gigantic dragon settled down and consumed its meal. Its body shape was similar to that of a Timberjack dragon, but this one had legs as opposed to the Timberjack's snakelike structure. He sketched a quick drawing of it, determined to commit it to memory if he ever saw it again. A short time later, the dragon took off in a spiral pattern, leaving a scorched char on the ground. Fascinated, he brought the topic up to Mildew when he got back.

"I saw a new dragon today," he said, showing Mildew the sketch. "Have you ever seen anything like it?"

Mildew looked it over thoughtfully. "Can't say that I have."

"There's something else too. It eats eels. The other dragons hate eels, apparently. They like fish much better. Which raises a question." Hiccup frowned. "Why are the dragons eating fish? That's all I ever see them eat there. I've never seen a single sheep. Why do they keep attacking and stealing sheep if they eat fish?"

"Does it matter?" Mildew asked. "They're terrorizing Berk. That's all that I care about. My grandfather was a chief, you know." His gaze grew distant, lost in memory. "Bandlaw the Braveheart was his name. He was good and fair chief, very different from your father in the way he ruled his village. He had matters always in control, with a firm hand." Mildew nodded twice to himself in confirmation, ignoring Hiccup's black scowl at the insults to Stoick. "But dragons were attacking our island. No matter what we did, we couldn't get rid of the pests. There were attacks every night. Soon no one had a place to live; every time we started work on a house, the dragons would destroy it as soon as night fell. Our food was gone, our homes were gone, our weapons were wearing out. All we had left were our ships." Mildew fell silent momentarily. "Bandlaw the Braveheart scattered his village into different directions on the open sea, hoping to find refuge on other islands. My mother and father and I washed up on Berk forty years ago, never to hear from the rest of our tribe again." He took a deep breath. "And that, Hiccup is why I've sworn to rid Berk of dragons. They cost me my home once, but they won't do it again. Heaven help anyone who gets in my way!"



Hiccup was silent. What could he say? When they reached Berk, he got out and headed home. Mildew is wrong, he thought. If they're not taking the sheep for food, then there must be another reason. If we could find out what that is, maybe we could get rid of them forever.

## 7. Run!

Author's Note: Alright guys, I'm thinking we have maybe 2-3 chapters to go. Hope you've enjoyed the ride so far! Thanks as always.  
~Bkw3rm

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><p>The next evening, Hiccup was musing over his notebook. His afternoon dragon-watching hadn't provided any extraordinary insights, so he was reviewing his notes to see if there was anything missing. He was deep in thought when he heard a throat clear. Hiccup jumped a mile. "Dad! Uh, when did you get back?"<p>

"This afternoon." Stoick rubbed a hand over his eyes.

"Did you find the nest?"

"No." Stoick looked at his son. "But I have heard some interesting things about you in the dragon arena." He pulled up a chair. "I want to know everything. We finally have something to talk about!"

Hiccup hesitated, rubbing the back of his neck. While he was proud of his successes in the arena, he was apprehensive of how his father would view them. What would his dad think if he knew that he was studying dragons to learn more about their weaknesses? He was silent for a long moment while Stoick waited expectantly. The silence grew and became more awkward. Suddenly, Stoick seemed to remember something. "Oh! I brought you something." He produced a Viking helmet and handed it to Hiccup. "This is for you. To keep you safe in the ring. It's, uh, half of your mother's breast plate. It's a matched set," pointing to his own helmet. "It keeps her close, you know."

Torn between feeling honored and majorly weirded out, Hiccup carefully placed the helmet beside him. "Dad, I haven't told you about how I got to be so good in the arena. Justâ€¦ just hear me out, okay?" He took a deep breath and began. He excluded Mildew's involvement to avoid upsetting his father, but told him everything else. To his surprise, Stoick actually seemed to welcome his unconventional methods. He listened with fascination as Hiccup told him about the different dragon weaknesses he had learned to exploit, asking questions in all the right places, laughing at some of the mishaps Hiccup had encountered. They talked long into the evening. At the end of the night, Hiccup went to sleep feeling happier than he had in a long time. He and his father were finally connecting after all these years. His dad had even promised to be there the next day when Gothi the Elder would decide which teen would slay their first dragon in front of Berk. It was worth the nightmares of the dragon haunting him all night long.

The next morning, Astrid shoved past Hiccup as they entered the ring.

"Stay out of my way, Hiccup," she threatened. "I'm winning this thing."

"I thought we were supposed to have each others' backs?" he questioned, just a little too innocently.

"I mean it Hiccup. You're not going to win this war with those tricks of yours. Berk needs a warrior who's willing to fight, not â€" tickle dragons or whatever you do!"

Hiccup leaned in suddenly, eyes blazing. "I'm willing to do whatever it takes to win this war, Astrid. I've spilled more blood than you ever have. I just need to prove it to Berk. That's why I'm winning today." As he stalked into the arena, he tossed over his shoulder, "Try to keep up."

Berk was out in full force at the arena. Bets were being placed on who would win, Astrid or Hiccup. Stoick was the loudest voice for Hiccup, and because of the chief's certainty, some Vikings actually switched their bet. The twins were even caught betting on Hiccup, much to Astrid's rage. "What?" Ruffnut asked. "He's better than you ever were." Hiccup caught the comment as he walked by and smirked broadly. He winked cockily at Astrid as the teens took their places. The dragon gate began to open. The Gronckle burst out of the cell, raging at the young people. Each did their best to defeat the dragon, but everyone knew the real battle was between Astrid and Hiccup. Astrid fought hard, not holding anything back. Her battle axe was ever at the ready, swinging and slicing through the air to deflect any attacks. Hiccup, on the other hand, was constantly distracting the beast with well aimed boulders. He was strategically guiding the dragon into a corner where it would be forced to land and he could render it unconscious.

Sure enough, the Gronckle fell into Hiccup's trap a few moments before Astrid struck. Hiccup could hear her cursing in the background. He paid her no mind though. He was looking up to the observation decks around the arena, Stoick looked so proud of him, he might burst. Hiccup could feel warmth building in his chest as he basked in his father's approval.

"All right, everybody, calm down," Stoick bellowed. "The Elder has made her decision!"

The audience immediately quieted. But the Elder's decision would never be known. In the hush that fell over the arena, a single sentry cried out loudly, "Outcasts and Berserkers on the horizon!"

The assembly was thrown into confusion. Everyone ran in different directions, mothers trying to corral young ones to safety, warriors rushing to the docks and the armory, and everyone else just trying to get out of the way. Stoick and Gobber by silent agreement grabbed some weapons and headed to the docks to meet the invaders.

The teens were left alone in the arena. Hiccup snuck away from the group as they debated what to do next. He knew he couldn't help his dad in a fight, but he had to know what was going on. He crouched on the hill leading down to the docks. The sentry had noticed the ships too late. They were too close for Berk to face them on the open water. The fight would have to be on land. Hiccup watched warily as the Outcasts' ship cast anchor in the harbor. The gangplank descended

and a massive Viking stepped out onto Berk soil, followed closely by a rangy teen. Hiccup tensed as he recognized Alvin the Treacherous and Dagur, the soon-to-be chief of the Berserkers.

Alvin smirked widely at his gathered audience. "Good people of Berk!" he bellowed. "Dagur, chief of the Berserkers, and I have come to declare a truce!" On cue, Dagur sneered and snapped open a white flag. "I propose we band together and rid our islands of dragons for good! And what's more," he purred, pointing to the armada behind him "We now have the army to do it."

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><p>Hiccup was astonished at how quickly things moved after Alvin's announcement. The Great Hall was cleared for the war council that was to follow. As a "show of good faith", only a few of the Berserkers and Outcasts came on land. The rest stayed on the boats, ready to move out as soon as the chiefs had come to an agreeable plan of attack.<p>

Hiccup had tried to reason with Stoick briefly before the meeting convened. Since he wasn't yet training to be chief and he wasn't officially considered a dragon warrior yet, he wouldn't be allowed to take part in the proceedings. "Dad, you can't seriously think of trusting him! He's called Alvin the Treacherous for a reason. He's definitely got something else up his sleeve."

"I know that, Hiccup. Don't forget, I know him better than most. But this is an opportunity we can't afford to miss. Alvin's already allied with Dagur. That gives him full use of the Berserker fleet. We can't lose against the dragons with odds like those. We just need a direction to point those boats in. Which is why I want to you to go back to your island and comb over every detail you know about those dragons."

Hiccup folded his arms. "Why does it feel like you're just trying to get rid of me rather than have me doing something useful here?"

Stoick rubbed his brow. "Hiccup, diplomacy has never been your strong suit. I doubt that's about to change now. But you have a way with the beasts that no other Viking has. You've gotten inside their heads! If anyone is going to find a clue that points to their nest, it'll be you." He rested his beefy hands on Hiccup's narrow shoulders, engulfing him. "I'm counting on you, son. Make me proud." He turned and strode into the Great Hall.

Hiccup stood there for a moment, considering his options. Then he raced down to the docks. Mildew would be in the council, offering his own insights on how to defeat the dragons, so he was on his own. He grabbed one of the lighter boats and set sail for the island, careful to avoid detection from the large Berserker fleet anchored offshore. No one on those boats noticed him, but Hiccup failed to take note of slim figure on shore watching him. The figure plotted Hiccup's course, then slipped into another boat in silent pursuit.

Hiccup tied the boat at his usual pillar. There would be no one to keep an eye it; he hoped that the sea would remain calm enough to the keep the boat intact. With one last glance in the direction of Berk, he made his way onto the island. The plateau was empty for the

moment, but he was a little earlier than usual. He took the opportunity to examine the spots where the dragons usually rested. There wasn't too much that he could learn here that he didn't know already, he thought. He decided to look around a bit more. Hours passed as he examined every nook and cranny of the isolated cliffs. Some dragons did come and land, but not many. He drew some more conclusions due to the evidence the dragons left behind on the island, but nothing that would indicate where the nest was. Having exhausted his options on the island itself, he went back to observing the dragons.

Nothing new presented itself. The dragons were just being dragons, occasionally scrapping over a preferred spot in the sun or a comfortable rock, yawning and stretching their wings or legs. Then the wind shifted directions. A Nadder suddenly snapped its head up, pupils narrowing into the thinnest slits. It turned in Hiccups direction. He shrank down behind his perch more. He was covered in dragon musk, so he wasn't sure what had attracted the animal's attention. He wasn't about to take any chances though, so he gathered up his notebook and prepared to leave when the dragon turned away. The other dragons seemed agitated too now, snorting and stamping their feet. Hiccup was beginning to get nervous. He needed to get out of there, now. He backed up slowly so as not to draw their attention. None of them had spotted him yet, but it would only be a matter of time.

He bumped into something. Slowly he turned around, expecting to see a dragon preparing to finish him off. Instead, he looked into Dagur's mocking face. "Hey, Hiccup," he sneered loudly. "Whatcha doing?"

The dragons erupted into full throated roars at Dagur's comment. Having located a target, they charged. "No time for that now!" Hiccup shouted. "RUN!"

## 8. Once and For All

Hello everyone! \*cringes\* I feel really bad for not finishing this before HTTYD 2 like I promised. Please don't hate me! I was emotionally crippled by the second movie. Yes, that is a valid excuse! But I'm back now! Still no set date as to when the final chapters will be uploaded, but it will be soon, (hopefully Friday). I've had the ending all sketched out since I first uploaded the story, it's just fleshing out the details, etc. Alsoâ€” I'm thinking of uploading a chapter after the story is complete with my own headcanons and deleted scenes that didn't make it into the story. Would you be interested in that? Let me know! As always, thanks for reading. Review, favorite, and recommend! ~Bkw3rm

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><p>Hiccup and Dagur skidded around the columns with the dragons in hot pursuit. The teens had the advantage of being able to slip in between narrow spaces, but the dragons were firing a steady assault of flames from above. Ducking and dodging, they barely managed to avoid getting scorched. Spying a crevice up ahead, Hiccup shoved Dagur towards it. A Gronckle was in hot pursuit, spewing fireballs rapidly at the retreating young men. Hiccup lost his left Zippleback boot and went sprawling. Mentally cursing his luck, he scrambled to his feet and kept going. Once they reached the safety of the cave,

the dragon hesitated. "Dagur, back up," Hiccup urged. "That Gronckle is too fat to get through here, but it has two shots left. We want to make sure that we're not in range." He felt Dagur nod and retreat further back. Hiccup was right. The Gronckle cried out angrily, but didn't fire. They were just outside its limit. He allowed himself a breath of relief. It was too early to congratulate himself, though; a Monstrous Nightmare had joined the Gronckle outside the cave. The large dragon wouldn't be able to fit its body in the narrow space either, but its slender neck would allow it to reach the boys easily. Hiccup froze for a moment, then tried to push Dagur further back into the cave.<p>

"There's nowhere else for me to go!" Dagur exclaimed, voice cracking. "We're dead!"

The Nightmare's head drew closer, almost seeming to chuckle at their predicament. It reared up and back slightly, angling for a better shot. Hiccup suddenly dived towards the dragon, sliding underneath it. As it prepared to fire, Hiccup seized the beast by the chin and scratched underneath its neck. For a long moment, nothing happened. Then the Nightmare shuddered and fell to the ground unconscious, pinning Hiccup beneath it. Hiccup groaned. "Hey, uh, Dagur? Wanna give me a hand?" He grunted, trying to shove the deadweight off of him. Seconds later, Dagur added his strength to Hiccup's efforts. They moved the dragon's head long enough for Hiccup to scramble out. Hiccup dusted himself off, acutely aware of Dagur's incredulous stare in the dim light. He cleared his throat. "Right, soâ€¦ the next order of business is to try and find a way out of here without getting incinerated. The Nightmare should be out for five minutes or so, so we have to disappear before it wakes up." He looks at Dagur, who is just staring at him, stupefied. He sighed. "Look-"

"How did you do that?!" Dagur yelled. "What was that? Why are you wearing a dragon foot? And-" sniffing, "Why do you smell funny?!" He crossed his arms impatiently, waiting for Hiccup's explanation.

"Can we talk about this later?" Hiccup gestured frustratedly. "We don't have much time."

Dagur leaned up against the cave wall. "Doesn't seem like there'll be a problem. I mean, you just took out a Monstrous Nightmare like that!" he said, snapping his fingers. "So tell me what's going on."

Hiccup groaned. "Okay," he began, "I've been studying dragons to learn if they have any weaknesses that we can exploit. The boots and the dragon musk help me get close to them without them noticing me. I've learned a few tricks to give me an upper hand. That's all. Now, can we please get out of here?"

Dagur shrugged. "Fine. Show me the way, oh Dragon Master." As Hiccup explored the cave searching for a way out, Dagur muttered, "What Alvin wouldn't give to learn those tricks!"

"I think I've found something!" Hiccup said, ignoring his companions mumblings. "There's a passageway in the rock here towards the back. It'll be tight, but there's fresh air coming from here." Both teens turned as they heard a dragon's cry outside the cave. "We'd better get moving." They slipped into the cleft in the rock, turning sideways to offer the least amount of resistance. Regretfully, Hiccup

eased off the remaining Zippleback boot. The crevice was tight enough that he would likely get stuck if he brought it with him. He promised himself he would make a new pair for Mildew once the dragons had been defeated, but then again, there wouldn't be a need for them then. It was painful going, easing themselves through the narrow passageway. The darkness and the rough rock made both boys feel as though they were suffocating. It seemed to take an eternity, but eventually they made it out into the evening air. Hiccup climbed up on top of the cave exit, trying to see if the dragons had left the entrance or if they were still circling. The dragons were still there, but they seemed less agitated now. Even as he watched, they were beginning to settle down. The Nightmare had backed out of the cave and was scratching its chin. One Gronckle landed and even started napping. Hiccup breathed a sigh of relief.

"They're done chasing us," he informed Dagur. "We should be okay now." He looked out at the sea. He had never been on the island this late before. Mildew's earlier warning of choppy seas came back to him. Hiccup's boat had surely been dashed to pieces by now. Stoick would have to come get them tomorrow. He opened his mouth to tell Dagur so, when the dragons suddenly caught his eye. They had all stopped fidgeting and were staring in one direction. Even the sleeping Gronckle had snapped awake and to attention. It was rather eerie, all the dragons were almost frozen in place. Then, with scarcely a rustle, they took to the air and flapped off in perfect unison. The night fog quickly obscured them from view. Puzzled, Hiccup tried to reason out their behavior. They hadn't done anything strange right before they took off. What could have triggered such a reaction?

Hiccup remember Trader Johan's tales of sirens who lured unsuspecting sailors to their deaths with their beautiful voices. Could there be something summoning the dragons out beyond seas surrounding Berk?

Dagur's hand dropped heavily onto his shoulder. "Come on," he said, "Let's get back to Berk. I'm sure Alvin and Stoick will be wondering where we got to."

"That may be a problem," Hiccup admitted. "The ocean gets rough around this time of night. My boat is probably smashed. We'll have to wait for a rescue party in the morning." He paused. "Why are you here, anyway, Dagur? Shouldn't you be in the meeting with the chiefs and advisers deciding on a course of action for tomorrow?"

Dagur shrugged. "My alliance with Alvin means that we've partnered to destroy the dragons. He provides the tactical strategies, and my army provides the sheer numbers to carry them out. My advice wasn't needed at the council. Besides, meetings bore me. Clandestine trips to dragon islands are much more interesting." He grinned. "As for your rescue party-" he used a stone to strike sparks off of his helmet and set fire to a nearby piece of driftwood, "consider it summoned!" He waved the flaming torch out towards the ocean. Minutes later, an answering light appeared about a half mile offshore.

Dagur chuckled. "I used the ship with my most loyal Berserkers to follow you. I told them to keep circling the island and wait for my signal. It's too big to come as close as your boat did, but, hey, it's intact!" The young men gingerly picked their way down to the rocky shore and swam the rest of the way to the boat.

As they made their way back to Berk, Hiccup thought furiously. There had to be a reason behind the dragons' strange behavior. He felt there was a logical reason somewhere, he just had to put the pieces together. He kept turning over all that he knew about dragons and contrasting it with their actions earlier that evening. His mind kept returning to the thought of siren calls and the dragons' trance-like state. By the time they reached Berk, Hiccup had an answer. If he was right, the combined forces of Berk, the Outcasts, and the Berserkers could destroy the dragons nest with one precise strike!

He raced ashore as soon as the boat docked. He could hear Dagur calling for him to wait, but he ignored the older teen. He needed to tell Stoick his theory before the chiefs came up with a plan that might put their warriors in needless danger. He burst into the Great Hall. Dagur came panting up behind him, making some comment about fishbones being surprisingly speedy for their size.

Stoick looked up at the interruption, frowning. "Son, not now. We're come to reasonable terms for a truce and we're forming a plan of attack. I'll let you know when we're finished."

Hiccup put his hands up in a placating gesture. "I know, I know. But Dad-"

"Now is not the time, Hiccup!"

"Dad, I know how to find the nest," Hiccup blurted. "I know how we can get rid of the dragons once and for all!"

## 9. The War Ahead

Author's Note: Hi guys! \*sheepishly hides behind laptop\* I have no excuse for not updating sooner, save this: Life. I've started working more and simply haven't had the time to update. To make it up to you, here is an extra-long chapter! I plan to work on the story weekly, and publish almost as quickly. We don't have much longer to go, please bear with me. Thank you for any reviews, favorites and follows, as always.

P.S. had so much fun writing Dagur in this chapter. I based his attitude towards Hiccup off of the "Night and the Fury" episode. Seriously though, I was chuckling to myself because I could hear him so clearly. My family thinks I'm nuts. Oh well. Enjoy, and please let me know what you think! Thanks. ~Bkw3rm

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><p>The Great Hall was stunned into silence by Hiccup's shocking pronouncement. For a moment the only sounds were the softly cracking fires lit around the room. Then everything erupted into chaos. All the Vikings present started shouting:<p>

"Stoick's little embarrassment never knows when to stop, does he?"

"He's surely gone round the bend this time!"

"Go home, boy, let the adults do the planning!"

However, a surprising amount of voices rose up to defend Hiccup.

"You never saw him in the ring! He's got a way with those beasts!"

"Aye, I say we give him a chance! I didn't hear any brilliant ideas from you!"

"All RIGHT!" Stoick thundered. The crowd hushed. "That's better. Hiccup, tell us what you saw."

Everyone assembled turned their attention to Hiccup. He swallowed nervously, his previous courage wilting under their scrutiny. He looked toward Stoick, who gave him an encouraging nod. Hiccup took a deep breath and dove into his story.

"I've been studying dragons on an island a few miles away from Berk." Confused murmurs rose from the crowd. "When the dragons aren't attacking Berk, they're mostly peaceful. They don't fight, they just fly around and eat fish." He paused. "I went out there tonight to find any clues that might lead us to their island. I think I know how we can get there."

Alvin laughed disbelievingly. "You! You expect me to believe that this slip of a boy, this fishbone here, is going to lead us to the nest?" He rounded on Hiccup, jabbing his finger at the boy. "You're hardly the dragon conqueror that I would expect."

"Leave him alone!" Dagur's voice rang out in the Great Hall. Hiccup was just as stunned as everyone else that Dagur, of all people would come to his defense. "Hiccup saved my life tonight from a Monstrous Nightmare! He has proven himself a true brother to me and to all Vikings. And what's more, he has proven himself to be a dangerous enemy to all dragons as well! I was there tonight. I can vouch for everything he says." He crossed his arms, daring anyone to contradict him. But a teen who calls himself Dagur the Deranged brooks no arguments. No one spoke up. He gave a self-satisfied smile and gestured for Hiccup to resume his tale.

Hiccup was still shocked at this unexpected show of support. Dagur was unpredictable at best, but he wasn't about to complain. He began again. "I've never been on the island that late before. The dragons did something I'd never seen them do. They'd been acting normally, but then all of a sudden, they all flew off in perfect unison. It was like the old tales of a siren's call. They heard something that we didn't, and it drew them away immediately." He took a deep breath. "I think there's something else living on their island, something that summons them when its time to come home."

"That can't be right," Spitelout said. "Their was a dragon attack tonight. It was time for them to attack. They came, they stole our remaining sheep, and they left!"

"But don't you see, that makes sense!" Hiccup exclaimed excitedly. "When they're on the island, they only eat fish. Something made them come and attack Berk and steal the animals. They're not eating them. They must be hoarding them back at the nest!"



"Even if that's true, how does that help us find the nest?" Gobber said. "Whether they eat the sheep or not, what matters is getting them to stop."

"Right." Hiccup rubbed his hands together. "The dragons are the only ones who know how to get to the island. We've gotten close, but never to the actual site, right?" Stoick nodded in affirmation. "Here's what I'm thinking. We take one of the tamer academy dragons, say, the Gronckle, and put it on the boats with us. We sail to the last area we've yet to search. The dragon should recognize its home and lead us right to it. Either whatever's on the island will summon it, or its homing instincts will kick in. Either way, we'll get to the nest and destroy it!"

The assembly was quiet as the everyone considered his proposal. Hiccup waited nervously, shifting his weight to back and forth. Mildew spoke up. "I think it'll work, Stoick." Hiccup looked anxiously towards his father. Stoick looked grim but not obdurate, weighing the consequences of the proposal. He heaved a sigh.

"Aye. It's our best shot before the ice sets in. Taking a dragon with us-it's risky but it makes sense." He turned to Gobber. "Can you make a harness to put the beast in and have it ready for the morning?"

Gobber looked thoughtful. "I should be able to. Hiccup," he addressed the young teen, "I'm thinking you already have some ideas?" Hiccup nodded. "Well, let's get started then. It'll be morning before you know it." He gestured for Hiccup to lead the way to the forge. As they left the Great Hall, Stoick, Alvin, and the rest of the Vikings began devising a plan of attack for the next morning.

Hiccup and Gobber worked well into the night, creating a sturdy harness that would contain the squat, powerful body of a Gronckle. Gobber hummed happily as he worked, occasionally trying to goad Hiccup into singing along. "Come on, Hiccup! 'I've got my axe, and I've got my mace!'" So it went. By dawn they had a harness ready for the Gronckle. They went to the training ring with several burly Viking warriors to wrangle the beast into place. It writhed and thrashed in a mad rage, but it was no match for the combined strength of the men. Once it was firmly secured, Hiccup put it to sleep so it would be easier to transport. Excited, he raced ahead of the group to the docks, stopping at the forge for one special invention.

When he reached the docks, he turned around and stared up at the cliffs overlooking the bay. Astrid and the rest of his classmates were standing there, watching the ships load. He couldn't tell for sure, but Astrid looked extremely envious. He smirked and gave them a cheeky wave as he headed over to Stoick. \_I guess the old ways aren't always the best, are they, Astrid?\_ he thought. \_He was going to kill dragons and rid Berk of its troubles for good, while they would be left behind, forced to pursue different destinies once dragons were no longer a threat. He adjusted the bundle under his arm and started forward.

Dagur, Alvin, and Stoick were loading the boats. The chiefs would take the lead boat with the dragon, and the rest of the combined fleet would follow. The ships were loading the last of the warriors as Hiccup arrived. Above them, Gobber winched the Gronckle onto the chiefs' boat. Stoick clapped Hiccup on the shoulder, almost causing

him to drop his package. "You've done a good job, son. I'm proud of you." He stooped to see Hiccup better. "I'll see you when I get back."

"What? No, Dad. I'm coming with you," Hiccup protested.

"It's too dangerous. I don't want you getting hurt."

"Dangerous? Dad, I know dragons better than anyone. You'll need my help." Hiccup spoke earnestly, trying to make his father understand.

"Hiccup, you know dragons. Extremely well, in fact. But you don't know how to fight them head-on. There won't be time for your tricks on the island!"

"Dad, I'm the best shot you've got at getting to the dragon's nest." He folded his arms in stubborn determination. "I'm going."

Stoick opened his mouth to argue further, but Dagur interrupted. "Leave my brother behind, away from the glorious combat that surely awaits? How could you even dream such a thing?" He slung an arm around Hiccup's narrow shoulders. "This is Hiccup's plan. I say he goes. And since I control the vast majority of the fleet" He trailed off, but his implications were clear.

Stoick glared at the young chief's attempts to threaten him. Before he could say anything else, however, Alvin cut him off. "Ah, let the boy come along, Stoick!" he said genially. "Wasn't he about to kill his first dragon in the arena anyway? Why not let him get his first taste of dragon blood on the battlefield?" Hiccup stared at the large man in shock. Why would Alvin be supporting him? His guard flew up. If Alvin the Treacherous wanted him on the boat, then maybe this wasn't the best plan. He took a step back, trying to assess the man's intentions.

Stoick huffed, exasperated. "Fine. But you stay where I can keep an eye on you."

Wary of Alvin, Hiccup replied, "I can do that." As they went to board the boat, he turned around for one last look at Berk's shores. As soon as his feet hit the deck, the boat was shoved away from the shore and their final journey to the nest began. Hiccup stored his bundle where he would be able to get at it quickly when they reached the nest and settled in for a long wait.

\* \* \*

><p>"And I'm talking to a dragon," Hiccup announced to himself. To be fair, the journey itself was rather boring. The sailing was smooth and efficient, and he kept getting in the way when he tried to talk to the other Vikings on board. Alvin was mostly keeping to himself, so despite Hiccup's misgivings, there wasn't much he could do. Stoick had brushed off his concerns about Alvin's strange behavior. He assured Hiccup that Alvin's most pressing concern was eliminating the dragons. Berk could wait for another day.<p>

"Can't he focus on two things at once?" Hiccup had asked. "You know, down two dragons with one bolas, as the saying goes?"

"Hiccup, I know you're trying to help. But I already know these things. Don't worry son. I have a plan in case anything goes wrong." Stoick had turned away then, Gobber having called him for assistance with a course correction.

To distract himself, Hiccup had gone to check on the dragon and make sure it was secure. But the harness was well-crafted and sturdy; the beast wasn't going anywhere. To be sure, the dragon was restless and "snorty", but it had been effectively muzzled to prevent it from firing. So Hiccup had settled down next to it and pulled out his sketchbook. He had never been this close to a dragon in a controlled setting before, and he was determined to learn as much as he could before they landed. But an all too-familiar black shadow flitted in his peripheral vision, taunting him that he'd been this close to a captive dragon once before. He squeezed his eyes shut momentarily, but it brought him no relief. To distract himself from the Night Fury's haunting presence, he had begun speaking aloud, telling the Gronckle about his discoveries as he examined the creature in depth. It was only after several Vikings passed by and gave him strange looks that he realized what he was doing. He shut up for a few minutes, pacing around the deck instead. Seemingly out of nowhere, a wall of fog had appeared on the left side. Hiccup vaguely remembered this location being called Helheim's Gate. It was an appropriate name, he thought. One could only imagine the horrors that awaited the unprepared. Behind him, the Gronckle stopped struggling. Hiccup spun around in time to note the change in the dragon. Its pupils narrowed as it responded to a call that only it could hear.

Hiccup stumbled backwards, then broke into a run towards Stoick. "Dad," he said breathlessly, "I think we're close." Stoick motioned for silence, and a hush settled over the ships. Father and son approached the captive dragon. As they watched, the Gronckle's sensitive nose went to work. Sniffing madly this way and that, the Gronckle's head slowly turned towards the left. "Hard to port," Stoick murmured softly. The call echoed quietly through the fleet as they entered the wall of fog.

Hiccup watched with fascination as the Gronckle successfully navigated them through a graveyard of wrecked ships and scars of ancient, fierce battles. Each time an obstacle reared through the mist, the dragon had indicated a course that narrowly avoided the object. As they moved further in, a low humming became audible, sounding all around them. The dragon became even more uneasy with this new development. Hiccup backed away slowly, keeping his eye on the dragon. He reached for his secret package, never taking his eyes off the beast. He kept feeling around for it, but his searching fingers couldn't find it.

"Looking for this?" Alvin whispered. Hiccup nearly jumped out of his skin. The older man chuckled. "I saw you put this away. I was wondering, what was so important that Stoick's brat thought he had to hide it from everyone. Imagine my surprise to find a crossbow!" He looked at Hiccup. "Of course, I'm sure it's no ordinary crossbow. From what I've seen of you, it probably has some fancy gadget on there to make shooting a bit easier. Myself, I prefer to use my fists and a sword to finish the job, but to each his own."

"What do you want, Alvin?" Hiccup demanded. The massive Viking made his skin crawl.

"Hiccup, Hiccup," Alvin chided. "The only thing I want is for you-" poking Hiccup in chest and knocking him backwards, "to focus on getting us to that nest safe and sound." He leaned in closer. "I want those dragons to stop terrorizing my Outcasts. So once you get us to that islandâ€¦ get out of the way." He shoved the crossbow into Hiccup's chest, knocking the wind out of him. "Gadgets like that aren't going to work when there's a dragon in your face, slavering to spill your blood. You'll cause more harm than good. Stay on the boat, and stay out of my way."

"Hiccup," Stoick whispered sharply. He'd noticed Alvin looming over his son. The glaring differences in their stature created a ludicrous caricature, but Stoick wasn't laughing. Despite Hiccup's fears, Stoick wasn't blind to Alvin's ways. It made the chief's strong heart falter a beat to even consider the thought that Alvin might harm his son. It wouldn't do to let Alvin see it though, so he sternly gestured for his son to join him at the dragon's head.

Alvin sneered. "Your father is calling you. Better run along, little Hiccup."

Hiccup needed no urging. He quickly took his place next to his father, missing Stoick's slight sigh of relief. Together, they guided the ships further into the fog. The humming intensified. The Fuguelgrasp grew more agitated as they continued, straining mightily against its bonds.

Hiccup checked himself. Fuguelgrasp? Where did that word come from? And why did it make him feel uneasy? He shook his head. Mentally putting his concerns to the side, he rechecked the Gronckle's restraints. Now was not the time to be losing focus. Judging by the animal's frantic behavior, they were almost there. The noise was reaching a crescendo, the dragon was tossing its head frantically andâ€¦ the boat came to rest on a rocky shore. Stoick was the first to leap out of the boat onto the beach. As soon as his feet made contact with the ground, the humming abruptly stopped.

"They know we're here. Ready the fortifications. No matter how this ends, it ends today!" At Stoick's command, Vikings swarmed the beach and started making pointed stakes in preparation for the war ahead.

## 10. Come Back to Me

Author's Note: All right everyone, I have no excuses. Just that life is busy and this hasn't been my main priority. I'm sorry for the long wait! But I'm determined to finish this story so it will stop banging around in my head. There is only this chapter and the epilogue to go, but I now know better than to make promises of when the epilogue will be uploaded. Thanks to all who have favorited/followed/reviewed-you're all awesome! ~Bkw3rm

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><p>It never ceased to impress Hiccup how quickly Vikings could prepare for battle. Hooligans, Outcasts, and Berserkers quickly created a fortification of pointed stakes, making the beach fully defensible. The dragons would be forced to fire from farther above, lessening their accuracy. Any dragon attempting to land would expose

its softer underbelly to the sharp wooden points that lined the gravelly beach.<p>

It was strange, he reflected. The dragons knew that the Vikings had arrived, yet they remained silent inside their caves. 'Why aren't they attacking?' he wondered. In the past few months, he had learned that dragons tended to be very territorial- about food, resting spots, even grooming areas. To not be defending their home was very peculiar, and it made Hiccup nervous. He felt an impending sense of doom, a niggling feeling in the back of his mind that warned him he was missing something huge. Hiccup looked around the beach. What was it that was bothering him? He turned slowly, surveying. Ignoring the black shadow flitting in the corners of his vision, his gaze slowly settled on the Gronckle. The beast was visibly afraid, but not of the Vikings around it. It's terrified stare was locked firmly on the mountain, and it struggled unceasingly to escape its bonds. It threw its weight back and forth, trying to break free. Hiccup turned to the mountain, then back again to the dragon. Whatever was agitating the creature was hidden deep inside that mountain. Suddenly the answer came to Hiccup, dawning with horrible clarity. The dragons were afraid of what was inside the mountain. Whatever was controlling them had to be awful if it was able to cow such vicious animals. And his father was about to give the order to crack the mountain open. Hiccup raced toward his father, full of awful certainty. Even as he ran, though, he knew he was too late. His father ordered the catapults to break the mountain open.

For a moment, all was silent. Then, with one accord, dragons came fleeing out of the mountains' caves. The air was filled with the sound of their leathery wings as they beat a hasty retreat. Vikings stared, openmouthed, as the beasts swarmed once around the island, and then headed out to sea. The Gronckle on the lead ship finally burst through its restraints and joined its brethren in flight.

"Is that it?" Gobber wondered aloud. The Vikings cheered loudly.

Hiccup's instincts said no. "Dad," he croaked, "I think there's something else on this island." At that, a loud, rumbling roar bellowed out of the depths of the mountain.

"Form your ranks!" Stoick shouted. "This isn't over yet!" Cracks zigzagged down the mountain as something enormous and ancient began to emerge. The dragon was gigantic, scarred with the scores of a thousand battles. It's eyes, perhaps the only small thing about the creature, glared hot hatred at the Vikings gathered below. It inhaled deeply, momentarily sucking away all of the oxygen on beach. Hiccup's mind worked frantically, trying to come to grips with the size of the dragon, trying to come up with a way to beat it. Weeks of dragon observations flashed through his mind, offering plenty of scenarios, but nothing that would help defeat the monster in front of him.

Unbidden, a thought flitted through his mind. "Forget the Night Fury; if I kill \_that\_ dragon, I'll go down in history!" He banished the idea. Now was not the time for glory, it was time for survival, if that was even possible. While he stood, frozen in thought, the people around him ran for the ships. It shook him out of his contemplation. As one, he and Stoick yelled, "NO!"

It was too late. The fleeing Vikings had attracted the beast's attention. Its eyes narrowed, and it shot out a jet of intense flame at the ships. Almost the entire armada was set ablaze. Dimly, Hiccup could see burning Vikings plunging into the sea. He swung his attention back to the dragon. Stoick called for the men to take refuge on the far side of the island. Before they could take action, the dragon uttered a low call. Its range was almost below human hearing, but they could feel the force of it rattling their bones. Even the fortifications not destroyed by the beast's appearance quivered and fell. The call echoed through the beach. The remaining Vikings froze. There was an answering call from the direction of the open water. Filled with dread, Hiccup turned. The dragons were returning to the nest. At the head of the charge was the Gronckle, pupils narrowed to almost invisible slits.

Vikings formed ranks on the beach, gripping their weapons with a sense of finality. There was no place to go. Most of the boats were burning wrecks in the ocean like some bizarre funeral send off for the men still alive on the beach. The dragons swarmed the beach, surveying the surrounded Vikings. The turbulence from their wings was staggering. Of course, no one quailed in the face of the attack. They were Vikings! Death by dragon attack was an occupational hazard. Some even seemed to relish the battle, goading the beasts into a frenzy.

"Dad!" Hiccup shouted over deafening cacophony. "Whatever that thing is, it's controlling the dragons, making them attack! We have to break that link!"

"I'm open to suggestions!" Stoick bellowed back. Hiccup grimaced in frustration. He had no ideas at the moment. "I need you to get away from the thick of this, see if you can get a new perspective." Hiccup nodded resolutely and slipped through the crowd, aiming for the cliffs behind them. Maybe some altitude would help him see the battle differently. "All right!" Stoick roared. "Two groups: I need volunteers to stay here and fight the beasts, and others to take on the big one!" The warriors immediately mobilized into two groups according to Stoick's orders. Now that there was a smaller target to focus on, the dragons started to attack more ferociously. The only thing that saved the Vikings from being slaughtered was that the largest dragon's control over the others was crude and inept. They fired ineffective shots, and snapped too late at men around their legs and feet. The result was almost a draw- the Vikings were even gaining an edge on the reptiles.

The rest of the warriors took up positions around the massive dragon, scurrying to the side whenever the beast shifted its weight. Due to its small eyes, they were able to stay in its blind spots with coaching from Gobber. Miraculously, one catapult had escaped destruction. They fired repeatedly into its underbelly, causing it to bellow in pain. Other Vikings simply pelted it with the biggest boulders they could find. Although these efforts turned out to be minor irritations, they had the effect of distracting its focus, setting some dragons free from its thrall. The freed dragons would wheel sharply, disappearing into the winter sky.

Hiccup had scaled one of the cliffs and was watching the battle unfold beneath him. Although the Vikings were surviving, it was clear they would lose due to sheer lack of numbers. The dragons would continue to fight long after the warriors tired of swinging battle

axes and swords. This had to come to an end quickly, before the peoples' strength waned. But how? He turned to the dragon beside him. "Well. What do you think?" he asked the Fuguelgrasp Night Fury. The dragon turned its scarred and blood-crusteD eye towards him. Then it ever so slightly inclined its head at the massive beast before him. Hiccup laughed hollowly. "Great. Thanks bud. How am I going to get up there?" In the back of his mind, he realized he had lost his grasp on reality, asking his delusions for advice and considering applying it. He couldn't bring himself to care. All that mattered was killing the queen dragon before it destroyed them all. He still had his crossbow, specially designed to shoot with hundreds of pounds of more force than he could hope to do on his own. If he could get up to its head, he might be able to imbed an arrow deep into its brain. Great. So now he had an insane plan, and no way to carry it out. Beside him, the ink-black dragon rustled its wings and looked at him expectantly. Hiccup shook his head in disbelief. "Uh-uh. I draw the line at riding delusions into battle." The dragon huffed and rolled its good eye. "You're dead, you know." Hiccup informed it. "And no one can ride dragons anyway." He grew angry. "Go on, get out of here! Stop HAUNTING me!" He flapped his arms in the dragon's face, till it turned and vanished into the cave behind them.

Hiccup started to slump against the cave mouth, but straightened suddenly. His antics had attracted the attention of the Gronckle. It was headed straight for him.

The Gronckle barreled into Hiccup, knocking the skinny teen into the side of the cave wall. Disoriented, he shook his head, trying to convince his scrambled limbs to MOVE before the Gronckle fired. The dragon was also confused, snorting and shaking its massive head as if trying to break free from the queen's hold. Its efforts proved futile though-its eyes narrowed in hate as it charged into Hiccup again, this time effectively plastering the teen to its face as it flew out to rejoin the battle. Hiccup panicked, his breathing heavy and heart racing as the dragon arced into the air. It was a rare fighting move practiced by the dragons when they felt particularly threatened; they would pick up a Viking, bring him high into the air, and let them fall. Most in the tribe were hearty enough to survive such a fall, but Hiccup would not be as fortunate. There had to be a way to get out of this. His father was counting on him to come up with a way to save them all.

Miraculously, he still had his crossbow. Hiccup grabbed an arrow with his right hand, clinging desperately to the Gronckle's maw with his left. The beast was nearing the apex of its flight. With seconds left, Hiccup jabbed an arrow into the dragon's neck. He wasn't strong enough to penetrate its skin, but that wasn't the plan. Like the stones it ingested, the Gronckle dropped from the sky. Hiccup scrambled up higher on the dragon's head. The Gronckle's body would likely take the brunt of the impact, but it would undoubtedly be a painful landing on the unforgiving beach below. He was so focused on the dragon in front of him that he neglected to realize the massive dragon beneath him. Both boy and Gronckle hit the behemoth and flew apart. The Gronckle rolled off the side of the dragon's neck and plummeted to the pebbly shore below. Stunned, Hiccup tried to scramble further back on the creature to prevent such a fate from happening to him.

His crossbow was about to fall off the creature though, so he had to effectively pounce on it to keep it from sliding off. The arrows

clattered to the ground below, leaving him with only the one loaded in to the crossbow. The beast beneath his feet moved like the rolling of a ship, throwing him off balance. There had to be a way to end this conflict before the dragons finished off the Vikings for good. There was an idea, niggling in the back of his mind. Something Mildew once said. "It's all about distraction." What better way to distract an angry, mind-controlling queen than by shoving an arrow into its eye? At this range, he couldn't miss. And it would certainly divert its attention long enough to free the other dragons and send them wheeling away. It was just the little matter of such an act being suicide. The Night Fury had thrashed around for several minutes before finally settling into stillness. The death throes of this dragon would certainly be lethal to anyone near it. But there really wasn't a choice, was there? He set off, climbing the gigantic frilled head and making his way to the vulnerable eyes.

The dragon barely registered his presence. Its skin twitched, the way a sheep would when trying to get rid of a fly. Even so, the motion was enough to make Hiccup stumble. He landed on his stomach, the wind knocked out of him. As he painfully got to his feet, he saw the battle unfolding below. His father was leading the charge, leveling any dragons that came within striking range. But that's not what had caught his attention. Alvin was slicing through the battle as well, cutting down dragons left and right. But his attack was calculated, precise. He was slowly but surely cutting a path through the carnage to Stoick. What was it he had told Hiccup? "Myself, I prefer to use my fists and a sword to finish the job." In a flash of blinding insight, Hiccup realized that Alvin was going to use the confusion of the battle to end Stoick's life. In the clamor and battle, no one would ever know what Alvin had done. His mind raced. It was an impossible choice! End the massive dragon's control of the others and end the war a hero, and let his father die without trying to stop it? Or save his father's life and risk losing the rest of the tribe to this bloody battle? Was it even possible to save his father from this distance? He most likely wouldn't survive the fall to the ground, much less be able to reach Stoick in time. But if he slid down the dragon's leg, he might just make it.

Time slowed down around Hiccup, much the way it did in the glade where he killed the Night Fury. He faced a choice then- become a Viking and gain glory, or choose life and compassion. He had made the Viking choice, and it had benefitted him for a while, but now he was forced to make it again, literally on a larger scale. He had gained glory, but not in the traditional Berk sense of the word. A true Viking would know what to do, but Hiccup was quickly realizing he wasn't a true Viking. Not the way his father wanted him to be at first. But as the last few nights had shown, that was okay. Using his strengths to his advantage instead of working against them made him better, stronger as a person. Someone his father was proud of. If he made the wrong choice now, he'd be a shadow for the rest of his life. Shadow! Something about that struck, making him think he'd missed some vital aspect of the situation. But there was no time to examine that angle. The rest of his life was bound to be very short either way, but he needed to act now. The urgency of the situation demanded it. Hiccup made his choice. He looked again toward the dragon's looming crown- and jumped, sliding down its left foreleg.

Hiccup stumbled to his feet, scrambling to get clear of the claws of the enormous dragon. He quickly set off on a parallel course to



Alvin, keeping a low profile so as not to attract any dragons flying overhead. He wanted to call out to his father, but dared not distract him from the battle he was facing. He was suddenly terrified that all of this would be for nothing, that he had sacrificed the chance to end this war for a futile attempt to save Stoick. He quickly banished that thought from his mind. He **\*\*\_would\_\*\*** get there in time, and Stoick would be safe. Anything after that, they would figure out together. Hiccup gritted his teeth and fought harder to get through the battle lines. Above him a few more dragons, released from their spell, fled the island and the creature's reach. This lessened some of the gale-force winds that battered the teen, making his progress easier. Suddenly, a gap opened up in front of him, displaying a terrible panorama: Stoick was grappling with a Monstrous Nightmare, the beast setting them both ablaze. The chief didn't yet seem hurt; his cloak had taken the brunt of the blast. But due to the smoke enveloping him, he didn't see Alvin charging up behind him, his face set in a terrifying smile of fiendish glee.

Everything slowed down. Hiccup screamed for all he was worth, "DAD!" and ran. Stoick started to turn, but he was too late. Alvin had swung for the kill, and there was nothing that could be done. The chief's eyes widened, watering in shock as the pain hit him. He had known that the other Viking chief might seize an opportunity, but with the battle raging, he'd focused only on getting his men out alive. Now, he had paid the price. He sank to his knees before his foe, staring sightlessly at the slender form bleeding out on the beach.

Hiccup had closed his eyes as Alvin's sword slid home into his chest. He could just barely make out Stoick's voice, pleading, "Come back to me, son. Come back to me." It made him sad, to hear the grief and worry in his father's voice. He wanted to comfort him, to let Stoick know that he wasn't in pain. He always had thought dying would hurt, but strangely, he felt nothing. He could still make out the faintest touch of sun on his face, of his father stroking his hair, but even that was fading. Hiccup exhaled one last time as the world spiraled into darkness.

End  
file.